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How Much Does Worry Affect Our Lives?

A radio discussion over WGN and the Mutual Broadcasting System

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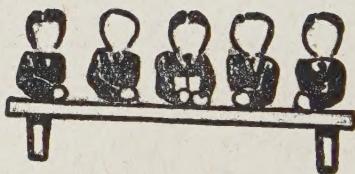
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How Much Does Worry Affect Our Lives?

MR. BUCHANAN: How much does worry affect our lives?

MR. BERG: Worry hinders us physically, mentally, and socially; but at times it helps us physically, mentally, and socially.

MISS SHARP: I think you're right. It does hinder us sometimes physically because as somebody said, "You don't get stomach ulcers from what you eat, you get them from what is eating you."

DR. NOVICK: That is right. Not only does it injure us physically, but it reduces our effectiveness. It reduces our effectiveness as husbands, as fathers, as workers, or as members of a community.

* * * *

MR. BUCHANAN: Worry, worry, worry. That seems to be everyone's complaint these days. The housewife worries about high food prices and how she can feed her family and still stay within that budget. The bread-winner is concerned over a pay boost, or the return on his investments, or the new advertising campaign. And even children are worried about what to get mommy for Christmas or whether there really is a Santa Claus.

How much should we be concerned about this worry?

Mr. Berg, you seem to advance two points of view on worry. Is it really a sort of a two-horned dilemma?

MR. BERG: Yes, indeed it is. We think of worry and how unhappy we are, but have you ever thought that if we lacked such concern, houses would probably burn down because we failed to extinguish the gas or a smouldering cigaret butt, bills probably wouldn't be paid, we wouldn't even ask for a raise in pay because we weren't worried about the cost of living. Many things that should get done wouldn't get done.

MR. BUCHANAN: Then, Miss Sharp, you seem to indicate that we may be able to control this worry, whether it is good or bad. Is that true?

Worry Is 'Concern Over Problem'

MISS SHARP: Yes, I think that is true. If worry is "being concerned with a problem," then a given amount of worry about the problem is necessary and normal. A complicated situation which faces us must be figured out and the problem solved step by step. Sincere concern—worry—about achieving the proper outcome for oneself and others should lead to purposeful and fitting activity. With activity worry can be terminated.

MR. BUCHANAN: Do you agree with these views, Dr. Novick?

DR. NOVICK: I certainly do. I have indicated that neurotic worry requires active treatment. But there is that division, very elusive, where worry is normal, as Mr. Berg has shown us. Prevention becomes equally important. Prevention, however, is not the concern of only psychiatrists but also of social scientists, economists, and many others. In fact, it was said not so long ago that if the Four Freedoms enunciated in the Atlantic Charter were actually carried out, this situation would do more for the mental health of the people of the United States than all psychiatrists combined.

MR. BUCHANAN: We seem to have advanced several views on worry. The one that disturbs me the most is the fact that I might not worry about a pay boost. I am not sure we are talking about the same thing. Mr. Berg, just what is worry?

MR. BERG: It can be a number of things. In some ways it is all things to all people. It does serve as a safety valve; it is a sort of means of protection, an insurance policy that certain things will get done, a very essential factor, this concern which we call worry.

MR. BUCHANAN: What about you, Dr. Novick?

DR. NOVICK: We may regard worry as a warning signal. It tells us of forthcoming danger, and it starts interaction. It sends us to the doctor, it makes us get out and get to work. In other words, under those circumstances it is physiological and useful.

MISS SHARP: Yes, but some of our worries are self-made. We crowd too many appointments and too many activities into our lives. People are always biting off more than they can chew. And we stew and fret and worry about how to get it all done. Now that kind of self-generated worry keeps us awake, inefficiently worrying about the next task and making impossible concentration on the work at hand. As Mr. Berg was saying, good planning and good worrying are necessary. I think the good planning of time and budget, the development of good working habits and a well-balanced day cut down worry and make rest and sleep possible.

MR. BUCHANAN: I never thought of it in this light before. Then worry actually is a normal reaction. Is that right, Mr. Berg?

MR. BERG: Yes, it serves as a means of forcing us to be concerned and to look to the future. It serves a very definite purpose in that respect. It isn't all bad. There are aspects of worry which are good.

Some Worry About Phantasies

DR. NOVICK: Yes, Miss Sharp has already touched on the problem where the usefulness borders on the point where it becomes destructive. Miss Sharp has touched on those situations where the individual worries about really difficult situations. But there are individuals with whom worry becomes an evidence, a symptom of an illness because they worry, not about real things but about phantasies, threats or dangers. Those threats or dangers do not actually exist, but they worry about them, nevertheless.

MISS SHARP: I think worry is normal and necessary concern for things, but the worries most of our friends think about and talk to us about are ones that we create ourselves.

For instance, one worry we have all experienced is the fretting we do to prove ourselves right and to avoid criticism. All of us have been involved, from time to time, in situations that make us look stupid. We don't want to admit it. We project the responsibility onto the other fellow and spend a lot of time developing good stories that put the blame anywhere except on ourselves.

Years ago I remember a minor automobile accident to the front bumper of my father's car. Now, I had been driving his car for a long time when I couldn't afford to drive it because I had no money and I was a student. At

the time of the accident I was out of that classification. In this case I was as much to blame as the other fellow, but I spent a good hour fulminating and inventing a fine story putting all the blame on the other person. I was going home to tell this alibi, and, of course, I was worried. I was worried whether the alibi would hold up or not, and I was worried about the whole show, whether the other fellow might tell what he knew. Suddenly it dawned on me that I could go to a garage, get the bumper fixed, pay for it and go home in peace.

Then and there I found out how much easier it was to take care of my own mistakes than it was to project my stupidity on someone else and worry about the consequences of my act. I think this technique of projection and alibis leads to more worry than it is worth.

MR. BUCHANAN: There may be a distinction here. That is not what you are talking about, Doctor, when you speak of these illusions, is it? Miss Sharp says we create certain worries ourselves, but they are worries about things that have happened, while you say we are worried about things that aren't really there.

DR. NOVICK: I think we can use Miss Sharp's example to illustrate what I meant. In the first place, when Miss Sharp worried about what father might say, although she was an adult she was really acting as a child. It is only as an adult that she could take the car into a garage and have it repaired, pay the dollar or two, and not have to worry about it. There she is worried about a phantasy danger. The danger wasn't really so great that the individual as an adult had to worry about it.

Our Civilization Leads to Worry

MR. BERG: Although sometimes we do create these difficulties, part of that is our own civilization. Our civilization is one of locks and keys and appointment books, of course, and we try to say that at 2:10 we will be at a certain place, and at 2:35 we are going to start doing something else, and a few minutes interference with the orderly progress that we have laid out in intellectual fashion means we get emotionally involved, we get entirely disturbed, we go through this upheaval which we could have avoided by allowing for human difficulties—inefficiencies, if you want to call them that.

MR. BUCHANAN: What are the effects of any sort of worry in the physical realm, Dr. Novick?

DR. NOVICK: The body responds by preparing the individual either for fight or flight so that individuals may meet the actual threat in the environment. Unfortunately, when worry goes to excess that individual responds physiologically in the same manner as though there were an actual threat. When no actual threat exists and such preparations are not necessary illness may result.

MR. BUCHANAN: The butterflies in the stomach?

DR. NOVICK: The butterflies in the stomach are frequently mentioned by patients to describe feelings of vague aches and pains in the stomach. Actually what the patient experiences is the result of physiological response to the threats.

MR. BUCHANAN: What about the actual physical reaction before an

athletic contest. In every one I have engaged in I have that sort of vague worry, but I think I probably played a better game because of it.

DR. NOVICK: Definitely so, because the body was prepared for the increased demands to be put upon it. Additional sugar was thrown into the blood stream, additional adrenalin was thrown into the blood stream so that the body was able to meet the additional demands placed upon it.

MR. BERG: Of course sometimes you don't have those additional demands, and that is when you really run into difficulties, when you shake and tremble and get all these butterflies in the stomach that go on for a while. You know, Dr. Novick, there is a 75-cent word that is going around, psychosomatic. Does that apply here?

DR. NOVICK: That definitely applies here. There is a definite correlation between the feelings of the individual, his worries, his anxieties, and the physical picture.

MR. BUCHANAN: Without paying the 75 cents, what is the meaning of psychosomatic?

MR. BERG: Literally, *psycho* means mind and *soma* means body, so psychosomatic deals with the relationship of mind and body and the effect that they have on each other. They are interdependent. Is that right, Doctor?

DR. NOVICK: That's right. Scientists have finally come back to direct recognition and awareness of the fact that the body is one; there can be no division between mind and body. The mind affects the body, and the body affects the mind.

Worry Affects Social Conduct

MISS SHARP: A person when he is worried is self-concerned; he is turned in on himself. He is not well-adjusted to the needs of the person in front of him. He is thinking of his own worries. He is neither a good listener nor a good conversationalist. He is worried about whether he is going to live or die, whether he is going to be successful or a failure.

I can't help thinking about John Newton Baker, who said that the reason worry kills more people than work does is because more people worry.

MR. BERG: There is another worry area, the mental area. That is, things take longer to get done. The individual is disrupted mentally. Also more accidents occur, we know that. Very often he complains that he can't concentrate. There is one thing that isn't widely recognized, but I suspect it is generally true. The person under a prolonged siege of worry at all times feels very insecure and very inferior. I think that is one reason why certain books in America on how to get new friends, etc., sell more than a million copies in a period of a year or two. It is that mental area, that feeling of inferiority, that develops as a result of chronic worry.

MR. BUCHANAN: That seems to lead into another field that we would call the social area, when you start worrying about someone else and not yourself alone. What happens with worry in this area, Dr. Novick?

DR. NOVICK: If the individual, because of his worries and anxieties, uses up a great deal of energy to solve his worries and anxieties he hasn't enough to use in a socially constructive area. If an individual uses his energy in solving his own problems he cannot as an adult give to others. He cannot

consider others, he cannot become interested in social issues or social welfare. He is a poor member of the community because he hasn't time for the community, he has to worry about his own problems. He is a poor worker—and by worker I mean both employer and employee, professional or any other type of work. It is poor emotional economy when the individual is worried. Compare it with financial economy. If we spend too much money on clothes, we haven't enough money to spend on something else. If we spend too much energy in worry, we haven't enough energy left for other things.

MR. BUCHANAN: What is the difference between persons which makes some worry more than others, Mr. Berg?

MR. BERG: One thing is the factor of values, that is, what is important to you. We have noticed that this varies with age. Older people, for example, tend to emphasize financial aspects of their lives. They have come to a point where various security aspects of love and affection are important. Now, in addition to affection, as a matter of fact more perhaps than anything else, they worry about finances. You find, perhaps, that children worry about the same things that old folks do.

Age Is Worry Factor

MISS SHARP: I think that is probably explained by saying that children have immediate needs, and they think only in terms of the immediate satisfaction. It isn't, "Can I go to the circus tomorrow?" It is, "Can I go today?" If it rains today then they are completely upset because they can't see any future. Oddly enough we find as we get older that we begin to worry about things that probably never are going to happen. We talk about the future, and certainly children have a greater hold on the future than adults do. But adults are always talking about things that are going to happen, 10, 20, 30 years from now. Maybe they keep themselves going like the old ear of corn we put out before the donkey. Maybe we feel we will keep on working.

The recent interest of psychologists is determining the individual's frustration tolerance.

MR. BUCHANAN: Now, wait a minute, you have lost me. *Frustration tolerance*, what is that?

MISS SHARP: We all know what frustration is, that is being stopped dead by some problem or some obstacle that we can't seem to get around, or some worry that stops us. Now frustration, I think, is accepted by everybody since the depression and the war. Things were too big and we just couldn't handle them. There were problems there that weren't self-made. So we had to tolerate or accept a certain part of that. The psychologists have been trying to figure out, both in the Army and in industry and in individual therapy just when a person has to blow up in front of frustration when he can't tolerate it any longer. Faced with complicated problems and frustrating situations, people react differently. We can't avoid hard and difficult situations; we can't ignore unpleasantness. How long can we remain calm and clear-minded in such frustrating periods so that we can deal effectively with problems and arrive at solutions? A person who goes to pieces and begins to fret, fuss, and worry when he is faced by a problem has a low

tolerance for frustration. He needs to learn to keep calm in the face of difficulties long enough to see the issues before him.

MR. BUCHANAN: That is this safety valve Mr. Berg spoke of before?

MISS SHARP: Yes, only I would like to talk about the safety valve as one degree of maturity . . . if you want to make it synonymous, maybe you can. But the degree of maturity is the measure of his frustration point. Now when I was a child I blew up easily. When I became adolescent I probably was unpredictable. I hope as one gets older one can raise his frustration point by knowing himself and realizing when to worry and when to become active in solving his problem.

MR. BERG: Yes, I think we could say there is a learning element. We learn to worry about some things and not to worry so much about others. We aren't all equally successful in our learning. Some people learn this very well. As a matter of fact, some people learn to worry so that's about all they do. Other people learn not to worry, and as a result they get a sort of armor plate. That is, they get wrapped in an insulation, a very effective insulation so that they just don't worry at all.

Persons Must Be Allowed Expression

DR. NOVICK: That armor can be an evidence of an emotional disturbance. The individual who develops such an armor plate that he doesn't let anybody get within an arm's length of him is an emotionally sick individual. And it requires an extremely concentrated treatment to break through that armored plate so that an individual can express himself. He must be allowed expression. He can't keep everything back. It is expected and it is normal that the individual does express various emotions at various times.

MR. BERG: You would say there is a sort of "here-we-go-gathering-nuts-in-May" philosophy, is that the idea? (Laughter)

MR. BUCHANAN: What worry is normal, and when does it go beyond that, Mr. Berg?

MR. BERG: First of all, trouble begins when you stop doing anything and you just worry. That is, when you just fidget or fidget you find that efficiency is very seriously affected. We should think, too, about competition against man. I think that begins in kindergarten.

DR. NOVICK: It begins before kindergarten. It begins in the home.

MR. BERG: I agree, Dr. Novick, it begins before kindergarten, but it reaches a kind of culmination when the child is officially in school. I remember my daughter, for example, complaining because one little girl always had the picture she had drawn with crayons put on the blackboard as an example of something good. We always are picking out someone who is better than someone else. It is competition of man against man or children against other children. We get a general attitude of, "Well, I just can't compete." After all, no one can be good in everything.

DR. NOVICK: Yes, that is one of the difficulties. Our culture is a competitive culture and we reward the aggressive and active individual. We pay too little attention to the ability of an individual to get along with another individual.

MISS SHARP: Of course I have to bring in the court. You might know

I would. During the depression the economic frustration and the inability to get a job led to great worry and people committed a great many anti-social acts. The community's attitude termed them criminals. Actually, they were worried people.

DR. NOVICK: Yes.

MISS SHARP: They fought at home, not because they wanted to fight their relatives but because of the lack of status, because they couldn't get a job. They fought outside, they got into trouble in the neighborhood, in the tavern, and they did that because they were hitting a world that was hitting them. Women went shoplifting, not for the value of what they got, but as an outlet for their frustration.

Worries May Pyramid

We have to mention alcoholism as an escape from worry and frustration. It is all very understandable because a human organism can stand just so much confusion and defeat and then it must react. But the trouble here lies in the fact that you are worrying over a serious frustration, and to that is added an anti-social act which brings with it arrest, public shame, and more worry. This is pyramiding worry upon worry until society has to reach in and regulate one's behavior. In the court we see the result of worry every day, and are trying to lessen worries.

MR. BUCHANAN: You can submit a bill to me later for consultation but I would like, Dr. Novick, to know what can be done?

DR. NOVICK: I think the most important thing is a recognition of the fact that neither society as a whole or the various individuals within society are perfect. We all have our faults; we all have our limitations. If we can accept our limitations, we can reduce the degree of worry that each one of us could experience and we would be more tolerant, not only of others but of ourselves.

MR. BERG: We need to realize there may be no complete answer to the problem, in others words. A lot of times we need to improve our techniques for attacking what is worrying us. Instead of just worrying, we need to use some technique for problem-solving like that of Dr. Seashore at Northwestern University. He developed a technique for systematically attacking problems. He doesn't guarantee answers, but it is a way of going at the problem. In other words, worrisome things are complicated, and we needn't look for a key.

MR. BUCHANAN: What is this system of attacking a problem?

MISS SHARP: Well, I think the first step would be to say, "I am worrying," and "how much worry is this problem worth?" "If I do this will it help; and if I need outside help whom shall I ask, and what would happen if I did nothing at all?" "What kind of a list of things should I make in order to take this problem, break it down step by step and then begin to match an activity or match a solution for each point?"

DR. NOVICK: I would put it in two words: know thyself.

MR. BERG: Of course, there are a lot of other things one can do. Some people go to a movie and feel less tense; other people read a detective story to indulge in certain escape literature.

MR. BUCHANAN: Yes, but isn't that an escape? Is that good?

MR. BERG: Many times it is an excellent thing to do because it cuts down the amount of worry—tension as you psychiatrists call it, Dr. Novick.

Other Interests May Be Solution

DR. NOVICK: It turns the interests of the individual from himself to others. Therefore, we consider it a healthy mechanism of defense.

MR. BUCHANAN: Are there any other means, then, that you might suggest, Miss Sharp?

MISS SHARP: I think you have to get away from the problem long enough. We know psychologically you have to go away from it in order to see it in perspective and to allow the errors to drop out. I think any activities that will get you up out of the worry chair and get you walking around and working out the problem are a good solution.

MR. BUCHANAN: You mean any activity?

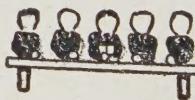
MR. BERG: A good hobby, for example.

MISS SHARP: That is right, or telephone your friends and know you are not isolated socially, or take a walk, or most anything that will get you back to, as Dr. Novick said, knowing yourself, knowing your assets and your liabilities.

MR. BUCHANAN: Three major points, then, I think have emerged. First, worry is normal. All of us worry, you say, and to worry about worry itself is useless.

Second, worry serves a definite purpose.

Third, if worry advances to the point where it is actually serious, there is always help and advice available.



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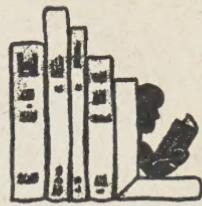
DO YOU FEEL YOUR AGE?
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Suggested Readings

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DUNBAR, HELEN F. *Mind and Body*. New York, Random House, 1947.

Study of the theory that physical ills may be caused by emotional maladjustments.

FOSDICK, HARRY EMERSON. *On Being a Real Person*. New York, Harper, 1943.

Essays that may help the reader solve his personal emotional problems.

HYMES, JAMES L. *A Pound of Prevention*. Teachers Service Committee on the Emotional Needs of Children. Caroline Zachry Institute. New York, 1947.

LIEBMAN, JOSHUA. *Peace of Mind*. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1946.

A psychological and religious approach to the problem of bringing peace of mind to the individual.

MENNINGER, KARL A. *Man Against Himself*. New York, Harcourt, 1938.

A study of the instinct of self-destruction that underlies certain mental diseases and physical states.

MENNINGER, KARL A. *Love Against Hate*. New York, Harcourt, 1942.

Discussion of the basic conflict of human life and of our civilization.

PODOLSKY, EDWARD. *Stop Worrying and Get Well*. New York, Ackerman, 1944.

Presents new methods and discoveries that may aid in creating a healthy mental approach to physical ills.

PRATT, GEORGE. *Your Mind and You*. The National Committee for Mental Hygiene, Inc. Recent revised edition of Publication originally issued by Funk, Wagnalls as one of the National Health Series.

SAUL, LEON J. *Emotional Maturity*. Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1948.

Extensive discussion of the principles underlying personality development.

THORMAN, GEORGE. *Toward Mental Health*. (Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 120.) New York, Public Affairs Committee, 1946.

Types of mental illnesses, their causes, and methods of decreasing their incidence.

New York Times Magazine. p. 40, Apr. 18, '48. "Anxiety the Villain." C. MacKENZIE.

Tensions that anxiety builds up melt away when problems are recognized for what they are.

Journal of Applied Psychology. 29:68-74, Feb., '45. "Worry Inventory." A. H. MARTIN.

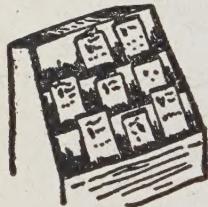
Analysis of causes of worry.

Hygeia. 25:950+, Dec., '47. "Worry; The Career in Our Lives." V. AIGELTINGER.

How a chronic worrier's relief from worry was reflected in the life of the entire family.

Reader's Digest. 53:67, Sept., '48. "Worry Germ." H. BOYLE.

Worry is a contagious disease spread by fear and remedied to a large extent by more rest and relaxation.



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